

Russia Calls New EU Sanctions on Iran 'Unacceptable'

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The Foreign Ministry condemned new EU sanctions on Iran on Tuesday, tempering hopes of closer cooperation between Moscow and the West over Iran's nuclear program.

EU foreign ministers on Monday approved a range of extra restrictions on Iran that went well beyond UN sanctions agreed upon last month. The new measures included a ban on dealing with Iranian banks and insurance companies as well as steps to prevent investment in Tehran's lucrative oil and gas sector.

"This not only undermines our joint efforts to seek a political and diplomatic settlement around Iran's nuclear program, but also shows disdain for the carefully calibrated and coordinated provisions of the UN Security Council resolutions," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

The use of sanctions outside of the UN Security Council framework is "unacceptable," the statement said.

The statement also criticized unilateral U.S. sanctions approved by Congress on June 24 aimed at squeezing Iran's energy and banking sectors. The EU and U.S. moves "display their disdain for the principles of collaboration," it said.

The comments show that despite a deterioration in ties between Tehran and Moscow this year, significant disagreements with the West remain.

"If the West wants something more from Moscow, beyond the UN sanctions it supported, it will have to earn it," said Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the Russia in Global Affairs journal.

Yet, Moscow's criticism of the West does not automatically mean better ties with Iran, he said. "Russia's opposition to unilateral sanctions is a position of principle; it does not amount to Russia supporting Tehran," he said.

Russia's decision to back UN sanctions in June represented a shift from years of support for Iran. Sharp words from Moscow and Tehran in recent days show relations remain tense.

President Dmitry Medvedev made his toughest comments yet on Iran's nuclear program in July, saying Tehran was moving closer to having the potential to create nuclear weapons. Tehran says its nuclear program is peaceful.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Friday that those comments were part of a "propaganda play" orchestrated by Washington. The Foreign Ministry hit back Monday, accusing Ahmadinejad of "fruitless, irresponsible rhetoric."

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